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PROCEEDINGS
OF
THE ROYAL IRISH ACADEMY.

1842.

No. 35.

June 13.

REV. HUMPHREY LLOYD, D.D., Vice-President, in
the Chair.

Maria Edgeworth was elected (by acclamation) an Honorary Member of the Academy.

Arthur B. Cane, Esq., B. J. Chapman, Esq., Francis M. Jennings, Esq., and Sir Thomas Staples, Bart., were elected Ordinary Members.

Mr. J. Huband Smith read a paper descriptive of the recent discovery of a vast number of Cinerary Urns at the Hill of Rath, within a few miles of Drogheda, on the road to Collon.

At the foot of the hill a quarry had been opened to procure stones for the repair of the road. In the beginning of spring the tenant in the occupation of the farm proceeded to level this quarry, by carrying down the earth from the brow of the hill; and in the progress of his work he discovered from 150 to 200 urns of unbaked clay, of various sizes, almost all placed in an inverted position, and covering, each of them, a considerable quantity of human bones.

As it seemed probable that a more careful examination of the portion of this interesting rath or tumulus which yet remained undisturbed might be productive of some discovery

calculated to throw light upon the still unsettled question of the date of this mode of interment, as well as "the authors of these sepulchral memorials," Mr. Smith was induced to undertake it, and accordingly proceeded to the spot for that purpose on the 30th of November last.

The rath appears to have occupied [the declivity of a hill, sloping gently to the west, and was originally enclosed by a breastwork of earth, of inconsiderable elevation, all trace of which had nearly disappeared, but which, according to report, may have once enclosed a space of five or six acres. The soil upon the surface having been found to consist of rich clay, had been from time to time spread over the poorer land adjoining. It was not, however, till the process of levelling was begun that urns were discovered; they were then found at a depth of from four to five feet beneath the original surface, resting upon the till, or gravelly subsoil.

Mr. Smith proceeded to a part of the hill pointed out to him as not having been yet disturbed, and, with the assistance of a few labourers, very soon had the satisfaction of laying bare four or five, or more urns. They were placed apparently without any regularity, about two or three feet asunder, and having been imbedded in yellow clay, without any flags or other stones to protect them, had in most cases been pressed in, and broken to pieces, by the superincumbent earth. One, however, which remained whole, Mr. Smith, by the utmost care in freeing it from the moist clay which surrounded it, and by allowing it to dry for two or three hours before he ventured to move it, was enabled to carry away entire, and he now presented it, with its contents, to the Academy.

These urns varied in size, and were in general from about eight to fifteen inches in height. Closely adjoining one of the larger ones, in fact crushed against it, lay two smaller, measuring probably but two or three inches each in diameter; these latter ones did not appear to have held bones. In

another instance a group of three or more urns, of a larger size, appeared pressed together. On removing the broken pieces of each urn the bones appeared in a little conical heap within, in very small fragments, the larger ones having fallen to the sides, mixed at bottom with black unctuous earth, and occasionally small morsels of charred wood. In the very large and fine urn which had been found previous to Mr. Smith's visit to the tumulus, and which he now presented to the Academy in the name of Mr. Kelly of Drogheda, by whom it had been disinterred, some very interesting matters had been found mixed up with a very considerable quantity of human remains which it contained. These consisted of a flint arrow head, a curious curved needle of bone, one end of which was flattened and perforated, and some small stone tools, one of which seemed likely to have been used in making the indentations or rudely sculptured patterns by which this urn, in common with all the others, was ornamented; and lastly, a small, thin scale of copper, pierced with a small hole. No other metallic remains of any kind were discovered, nor upon the closest inquiry does there seem any ground for supposing that any ornaments, either of silver or gold, such as have been so frequently obtained in barrows and other sepulchral tumuli, both here and in England, were found in this rath. This last mentioned urn, which was the largest discovered here, measures seventeen inches in height, and the same in extreme breadth; and would probably contain about eight gallons of liquid.

The most remarkable differences between this tumulus and most other repositories of the ashes of our pagan predecessors, both in this country and in England, appear to be the vast number of urns which were found here, in one vast cemetery, and the total absence of any kist of flags, or other cavity formed to receive and protect the urns from the pressure of the earth either laterally or from above.